

and one has the sense that both tribal and erotic rituals are being played out in this strong film. Wearing black clothing, Hassinger continues to paint her face until it is completely covered with pigment. The entire work is a celebration of the color black and the construction of a cultural blackness whose implications have much to say for the assertion of cultural esteem as it affects the individual. Hassinger is an artist of unusual directness, but her creative force does not forget the complex subtleties in the way that Americans, or more specifically black Americans, live now. Her show evidences a recognition of natural and cultural assertions that makes her very much an artist of new forms, even as she relies on traditional ones to make her point.

—Jonathan Goodman

New York

Catherine Lee

Galerie Lelong

Catherine Lee's combination of system and intuition is rare in art nowadays. It is as original as her technical maneuvering is precise—she is a rigorous aesthete. Given her confidence in the structure of art, she gives emphasis to materials rather than belaboring a concept. Working from a position of extreme clarity and understanding of abstraction—whether the medium is oil on canvas (where her career began in the '70s) or cast bronze, iron, steel, and raku-fired sculpture—Lee is deeply committed to the appearance and the material function of her forms. Her obsession is justified given the signifying role that materials often perform in our reading of sculpture.

It is exactly on this point that Lee has made an incremental leap, expanding her scale, placement, and concept of materiality in a modular, knife-edged grid titled *To Alabama* (2002–04). In a new group of large-scale steel monoliths, "Hebrides" (2004),

she dislodges the singular flat forms from the surface of the wall and integrates them into three-dimensional space. (The title is derived from the group of islands off the coast of northern Scotland where large stone monoliths built of Callanish stones are situated.) In this remarkable new series, Lee has achieved a virtual and physical reinvention of abstract sculpture in terms of specific forms.

Whereas sculpture in the "expanded field" temporarily declared the end of abstract form in the late '70s, Lee has brought it back—not by way of theory, but through her own physically dynamic, intuitive systems. These "hard edge" geometric and faceted forms originate in Cubism and are related to Lipschitz, Laurens, and Archipenko. In the "Hebrides," Lee extends Cubist sculpture and gives it a present-day vocabulary. The historical

dialectic, however, does not disappear. It is infused into the rich and delicate patinas that Lee has given to the surfaces. What is curious, and possibly heroic, about these works—in addition to the imaginative cuts, angles, and joints masterfully welded into place—is that Lee constructed them while suffering from an acute back problem caused by a severe automobile accident a few years ago. To witness the enormous grace and ineluctable presence of these massive forms suggests Lee's will and power—both physical and mental—in a manner that transcends both normal human limitations and ordinary academic formalism.

Lee again addresses the flatness of the wall in another major work, *To Alabama*. With its cracked raku glazes, each element is marked with a decisive X, as if to certify its presence within the

structure of the grid. This maneuver suggests the artist's need to reassure herself that these modules continue to exert their grammatical presence, giving forth a language open to the threshold of how we read the pre-linguistic essence of form. This may happen in the instant before consciousness or it may happen before a concept is betrothed to material, before that marriage enters an epistemological order and alphabets are born. Lee gives us unconscious and oblique pronouncements of the human soul.

—Robert C. Morgan

New York

Atsuko Tanaka

Grey Art Gallery

In 1956, Jiro Yoshihara, a prominent industrialist who before the war was a respected Surrealist artist, founded the Gutai Art Association (Gutai Bijutsu Kyoka) in Osaka. He proposed that artists go directly to form before meaning and advocated the use of unconventional materials. Yoshihara's ideas grew out of a familiarity with and critical response to Pollock and the post-war rhetoric of newness. The group maxim was "Do something that no one before you has done. . .do something new." And indeed the Gutai performed experiments that would, in the following decades, prefigure key movements in Western art—happenings, performance, environmental, and conceptual art. The Gutai also explored the intersection of humor and magic and made art accessible to the larger public: their interaction with viewers challenged art world elitism.

Redefining the relation of the body, artistic material, objects from daily life, and exhibition space, Atsuko Tanaka's work stands out within the Gutai's output. She made artworks that challenged even the few norms of the group. Her installations, sculptures, drawings, paintings, video performances, and actions were groundbreaking. In the 1956 performance

Catherine Lee, installation view of the "Hebrides," with (left) *Scalpay*, 2004 and (right) *Lewis*, 2003. Fabricated and patinated bronze.





Atsuko Tanaka, *Electric Dress*, 1956 (reconstruction, 1986). Enamel paint on light bulbs, electric cords, and control console, 165 x 80 x 80 cm.

series *Gutai on Stage*, Tanaka's contribution was *Stage Clothes*. One major element, the huge *Work (Red Dress)*, had sleeves over 30 feet wide.

In another variation of *Stage Clothes*, Tanaka used her body as a free-form sculpture or canvas to create a composition of variable shape and color. Performing live in front of a pink backdrop and a camera, she transformed herself before the audience with a series of specially constructed costumes. One consisted of trick sleeves and removable panels that when detached revealed additional layers. The fabric twisted or released to create new clothes as she

gradually stripped down to her black leotard and tights. The lighting-quick costume changes, implemented by snaps and stitches, were possibly imitative of a tactic used in Noh Theater. But Tanaka employed the strategy to transform her body into a continuously moving sculpture. The metamorphosis of the thing and the clothed person broadens a complex circuit of forms of identity. Fluidity among these signs makes possible the disguise, the shift and simulation of a mobility between identities, objects and images, things and bodies. Two of these dresses were shown along with videos of her performance.

Electric Dress, an important wearable sculpture, radically fused the tradition of the Japanese kimono and modern industrial technology. Made up of wires decorated with colored and painted flashing light bulbs, the dress when first exhibited was worn by Tanaka, who, according to the curator, experienced the lights of the city on her body while at the same time fearing electrocution. The sculpture was so heavy that Tanaka could not move but simply stood under its weight; in later performances, it was worn by men. She finally used the plans for the construction of the dress to fuel the complex language of her subsequent drawings and paintings.

By focusing on the body, Tanaka anticipated feminist works of the '60s and '70s. In the '80s and '90s, clothing became a subject for many artists, as in the 1995 ICI-sponsored exhibition, "The Empty Dress" curated by Nina Felshin, and the 1997 Florence Biennial "Arte Moda," which included dress/sculptures by Judith Shea, Rosemarie Trockel, Jana Sterbak, Charles Le Dray, Jan Fabre, Oliver Herring, Beverly Semmes, and Louise Bourgeois. In Tanaka's hands, the garment takes on a shamanistic character, serving to exorcise the presence of the social (represented by the chaos of politics), then reducing it all to a state of perfect organization.

By 1962 Yoshihara was provoking the Gutai to relinquish more control, to bring the art exhibition out of the museum space, and to work in relation to nature. In 1968, after leaving the Gutai, Tanaka created *Round in Sand*, a performative earthwork in which she traced ephemeral circles and lines into wet sand. A video of the performance was exhibited at the Grey. The show also included a selection of key documents and materials about the Gutai, placing Tanaka's work in context.

—Carolee Thea

Seattle

John Buck

Greg Kucera Gallery

Montana-based sculptor and printmaker John Buck's survey of recent works underscored the eccentricity of his vision. This was the 58-year-old artist's fifth exhibition in Seattle since 1986. Nine large-scale sculptures were joined by five shadow-box-like wall assemblages and three prints. Buck has moved a long way from his origins as a University of California, Davis, Funk sculptor. His current mythic/symbolic iconography takes the form of intricately carved works made of jelutong wood, glass, and bronze. If anything, the plethora of recognizable images within each work sometimes leads to a sensation of overload, with little possibility of following either a narrative thread or decoding a myth.

The influence of Funk art and earlier artists like Jeremy Anderson and William T. Wiley is still present to the extent that material illusionism is a dominant, underlying trope in Buck's work. While this might serve to reinforce technical virtuosity, Buck's command over figuring, fashioning, carving, and piling on the imagery can weary the viewer at times.

The figures have no heads, so there is no identity or possibility of portraiture. This makes the male and female nudes a bit generic. When one wants to unravel the raft of images—globes, branches, leaves, infinity symbols, the Taj Mahal, horses, dragons—the artist's processes and decisions do not add up to a coherent story. That leaves plenty to talk about and look at, but it also restricts the sculpture to the willfully hermetic disposition of the maker.

In Buck's new work, imaginary machines that actually move serve the purpose of entering the world of the unknown. In *The Magnificent Gadget*, nothing seems related, but the entire object revolves thanks to an electric motor. Ditto *Against the Grain*, *Omnibus*, and *The Ascent* (all 2004). Like fantastic folk-art contraptions, these works are quaint